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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: IRANIAN ACADEMIC AND DIPLOMAT OUTLINES  
IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

REF: DUBAI IRPO 76

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The study of Iranian foreign policy suffers from reductionist and simplistic approaches that boil the subject down to sound bites and labels, Ambassador Seyed Mohammed Kazem Sajjadpour, Associate Dean of Research at the Iranian MFA College of International Relations, told a small group of Turkish and foreign diplomats, academics and press on March 30. Sajjadpour explained that three issues need to be considered when analyzing Iran's foreign policy: the duality of revolution and state, internal debates within Iran, and trends in Iranian foreign policy, namely continuity, adaptability and regional engagement. He emphasized that Iran, like any state, prioritizes its security, along with its prestige and the promotion of its culture. The continuity and legitimacy of the state come from the Iranian revolution -- a "rare political commodity," which he likened to the American revolution as a "long-term affecting phenomenon." END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) The Turkish Economic and Political Research Foundation (TEPAV), which is endowed by the Turkish Union of Chambers and of Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), hosted on March 30 Ambassador Seyed Mohammed Kazem Sajjadpour, Associate Dean of Research at the College of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, for a discussion, "The Foreign Policy of Iran: Understanding the Concepts, Debates and Trends." A relatively small group (20-30) Turkish and foreign diplomats, academics and journalists attended. Sajjadpour, a former Ambassador to the Iranian Missions to the UN in Geneva and New York, with a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Washington University and a Post-Doctoral fellowship at Harvard, was accompanied by an Iranian diplomat who the moderator introduced briefly as "former Ambassador to Africa Jabbari." (NOTE: This appears to have been the former Iranian Ambassador to Sierra Leone Hamed Jabbari. END NOTE.) Jabbari did not speak. Sajjadpour spoke off the record and, he underlined, not on behalf of the Government of Iran.

STUDYING IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY:  
NEW CONCEPTS NEEDED  
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13. (SBU) Sajjadpour opened by positing that the study of Iranian foreign policy is important because, one, it is a

leading international issue and, two, the intellectual supply of knowledge of Iran's foreign policy is poor. Presently, there are two broad approaches toward its analysis: reductionist and simplistic. The reductionist approach, ideal for radio and TV commentary, boils Iran down to a single issue, e.g., the nuclear issue, without any contextualizing. The simplistic approach tries to take the complexities of Iranian society and deduce them to a single framework, e.g., Islamist, terrorist, repressive, etc. He joked how an American academic once received his business card and expressed surprise that he had an email address. Sajjadpour maintained that both approaches are dangerous, as they contribute to a view of Iran as hegemonic or neo-Persian imperialist and needing to be contained. The "fear industry," he said, resulted in an eight-year war with Iraq that cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Therefore, new concepts are needed in the study of Iranian foreign policy.

#### THE DUALITY OF REVOLUTION AND STATE

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¶4. (SBU) The primary foundation of Iranian foreign policy is the duality of revolution and state. Iran is a state: It has a geography, borders, establishment, institutions, privileges and responsibilities. Like any other state, Iran prioritizes its security, along with its prestige and the promotion of its culture. It is, Sajjadpour reminded, one of the most bordered countries in the world, sitting at the crossroads of five distinct regions. Its foreign relations are thus complex. Turkey and Iran, for example, have shared a stable border since 1639, so Turkey-Iran relations cannot be reduced to just one issue, e.g., the nuclear issue. In addition, Iran is a diverse country and there is a "human geography" that ties Iran to other countries of the region.

He cited as an example Lebanon, with which Iran has had cultural and political ties going back centuries to the Saffavids; Hezbollah is only a modern component of a complex relationship that cannot be labeled clientist. He called Iran a "cultural entity" that is a reference for and unifies other cultures.

¶5. (SBU) The basis for the legitimacy and continuity of the Iranian state comes from the Islamic revolution. He called the revolution a "rare political commodity," which, like the American or French revolutions, is a "long-term affecting phenomenon." Sajjadpour used as an example President Obama's invocation of the American Revolution in his inauguration speech to reinforce his point about the durability of revolutions and to suggest that the U.S. too is a revolutionary state. Contrary to American history, however, he argued that the U.S. is anti-revolutionary in its foreign policy and too often slow to digest -- and often resists -- popular revolutions that take place abroad. One Italian diplomat pointed out in a question that history has shown that revolutionary states ossify over time and that Iran should perhaps move beyond this concept, but Sajjadpour returned to the inextricable link between the revolution and Iranian statehood.

#### EVERYTHING IS DEBATED

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¶6. (SBU) Iran is not a black and white society; all things are debated, deconstructed, reconstructed and reshaped. There are six major, dynamic debates ongoing in Iran:

- What is it to be a Muslim?
- What is it to be an Iranian; how do you reconcile Persianism with Islamism?
- Why is Iran economically backward; how do we overcome underdevelopment?
- How do we govern, i.e., how do we ensure liberty and political participation (a debate ongoing since the 1906 constitution)?
- How do we ensure our independence?

- How do we ensure justice?

There are other debates, including who is Iran's friend in the world and to what degree should Iran have a "sphere of influence."

¶7. (SBU) Sajjadpour underscored the concepts of independence and justice as critical elements of Iran's foreign policy. It has a responsibility to speak for all Muslims.

#### THE TRENDS: CONTINUITY, ADAPTABILITY AND A REGIONAL APPROACH

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¶8. (SBU) The geographic realities Iran faces are constant. Therefore, out of strategic necessity, continuity will underscore Iran's foreign policy, and will ensure that Iran seeks to be engaged in all regional issues in its "strategic space." At the same time, Iranian foreign policy is not rigid and ideological, Sajjadpour maintained. Iran, he said, has survived for six millennia by being adaptable -- even mastering the ability to convert its own conquerors to its culture and faith. Adaptability will, at times, inform positions of neutrality, as it did in the first Gulf War, where Iran stayed out of the conflict despite its grievances against Saddam Hussein. To have assisted the U.S. would have been counter to the values of the revolution; the consequences for the legitimacy of the state could have been

profound. Last, Sajjadpour said Iran is undeniably becoming more interested in its surroundings. Iranians are highly skeptical that they could ever be accepted by the West as "part of the club." The West is culturally different and Iran is more at home with a regional approach. And the region, Sajjadpour pointed out, includes Russia.

#### PROSPECTS FOR NORMALIZING U.S.-IRAN RELATIONS

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¶9. (SBU) Fielding a question from a UK diplomat, Sajjadpour observed that the change in tone in Washington has prompted considerable debate in Iran on how to adjust its approach to the U.S., but he expressed skepticism about the prospects for U.S.-Iran relations. Referring back to the concepts of independence and justice, he suggested that Iran, with its long list of historical grievances, will not find it easy to base relations with the U.S. on an "item-oriented" approach, i.e., partnering on Afghanistan without resolving other issues. Iranians want a "grand bargain." Iran facilitated the overthrow of the Taliban, but was rewarded with the designation of "axis of evil." Nevertheless, Afghanistan is important. The refugee problem is believed by the Iranian public to be contributing to unemployment, and drug trafficking has worsened. Sajjadpour said the study and knowledge of the West has deepened in Iran, though it is also simplistic at times. Fundamentally, however, for the image of the West to change in Iran, the West will have to modify its behavior more than Iranians will have to deepen their understanding.

#### COMMENT

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¶10. (C) Sajjadpour was friendly and engaging in his presentation. But he was also defensive, and rarely introspective or self-critical. To the extent he captured accurately the concepts and trends in Iran's foreign policy, he also used the framework to push back on any implicit criticism of Iran's foreign policy from the audience. Asked by a prominent Turkish journalist about concerns that Iran seeks to export its revolution, he dismissed it as a reductionist view, and responded that Iran, like any state, seeks only to promote its culture and ideals. "Revolutions are neither exportable, nor containable," he said. Never mind that Iranian diplomats in Turkey, including a current Deputy FM, have been PNG'd by Ankara in the past over these very concerns. Likewise, he disputed an observation from the

moderator that Iran may have chosen to pursue its nuclear program in order to break its diplomatic isolation, responding that isolation was a label used against Iran, and that it was the U.S. which had isolated itself. Indeed, the Iranian seemed to lack any appreciation for the fact that Iran, however rational its approach may be, causes considerable nervousness in the region, not least in Turkey, and probably overestimated his country's cultural and political magnetism.

¶11. (C) The emphasis of revolution as a key concept in Iranian foreign policy must have struck some Turkish listeners as odd. Like Iran, Turkey can be said to be a revolutionary regime; the secular revolution initiated by Ataturk has been at least as profound and enduring an experience for Turkey as the Islamic revolution has been for Iran. Yet Turkey has not sought, implicitly or explicitly, to export this revolution, which was, in any case, specifically Turkish and meant to orient Turkey toward Western civilization. While the principles of the Kemalist revolution -- nationalism, independence, and secularism -- inform Turkey's foreign and domestic policy, the Turks have proven to be far more pragmatic and flexible than Iranians, despite the continued but failing efforts of statist and reactionary Turks to institutionalize a revolutionary mentality. It is, ironically, this very pragmatism that has allowed Turkey to seek positive relations with an Iranian regime whose principles and world view stand in stark contrast to its own, even as the internal debates are largely the same.

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Jeffrey